

The early settlement and history of Redwood County /

**THE EARLY SETTLEMENT AND HISTORY OF REDWOOD COUNTY.* BY HON.
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The act creating Redwood county was passed by the session of the legislature of 1862, and a second act changing and defining its boundaries and providing for its civil organization was passed in 1865. This area had previously formed a part of Brown county, and earlier of Blue Earth county. The boundaries of Redwood county, as established by these acts, reached to the west line of the state and northwest to Big Stone lake. At later dates, the counties of Lyon, Lincoln, Yellow Medicine, and Lac qui Parle, have been formed from the territory originally included in this county. Its present area, which it has had since 1871, comprises nearly twenty-five townships of the government surveys, including five fragmental townships on the northeast adjoining the Minnesota river.

In the organization of most counties in the state, the fact of prior ownership and occupation by Indian tribes is taken for granted; but in the case of Redwood county, because a part of its territory had already been occupied by farms with houses, plowed lands in crop, and a fairly developed agricultural industry, it is necessary to revert to previous conditions in order to have a full understanding of its history.

In the years 1856 to 1858 the United States government, under the influence of those who believed that the Indian should be given the opportunity to become a citizen, and that the true policy for the management of the wards of the nation was through their adoption of habits of industry which should lead to self-support and independence, inaugurated the policy of building houses, breaking up land, and furnishing teams, implements, and such other supplies as were necessary to enable the Indian to have a fixed home and

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adopt the habits of civilization. Among the reservations set apart for this purpose was the Sioux Indian reservation on the west bank of the Minnesota river, a strip of an average width of ten miles and extending from a short distance above New Ulm to Big Stone lake.

There were over 6,000 Indians on the reservation at the time of the outbreak in 1862, known as the "Annuity Sioux Indians," divided between the upper agencies at Lac qui Parle and Yellow Medicine and the Lower Sioux Agency in what is now the town of Sherman in Redwood county. There was a superintendent at each agency, and a thorough system of farming had been established prior to the outbreak, which gave promise at an early day to make the Indian both self-respecting and independent. At the Lower Agency the government buildings, with the trading posts of Messrs. Robert, Forbes, and Myrick, formed quite a village. In that vicinity about 800 acres of land had been broken up, comfortable brick houses had been built, and altogether the outlook was promising for the success of the effort to lift the red man to a higher plane of existence. "The hopes of the philanthropist and Christian beat high. They believed the day was not far distant when it could be said that the Sioux Indian as a race not only could be civilized, but there were whole tribes who were civilized, and had abandoned the chase and the war path for the cultivation of the soil and the arts of peace; and that the juggleries and sorceries of the medicine man had been abandoned for the milder teaching of the missionaries of the cross." How their high hopes were blasted by the uprising and massacre of 1862 it is not the purpose of this paper to recite, as the subject is only introduced to show that, previous to its settlement by the white man, Redwood county has a history of settlement and cultivation as well as of rapine, plunder and blood.

Redwood county took its name from Redwood river, which rises in Lincoln and Pipestone counties and flows easterly across this county into the Minnesota, below Redwood Falls. 281 There is a frontage of about twenty-seven miles on the Minnesota river. Along this river, at the time of the first settlement, there were considerable tracts of timber, which, with a few other tracts on the Cottonwood river and some small groves, furnished the wood and lumber supplies for the pioneers. The remaining portion of the land was a gently

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undulating prairie, with a deep soil of black loam underlain by clay. For general farming purposes, it may be classed as equal to any in the state. There were at the first a great many sloughs and a number of what were considered permanent lakes; but cultivation of the adjoining lands and change of the seasons have made meadows of the greater number of the sloughs, and it can now be seen that within a few years not a permanent lake of any size will remain. The first requirement of the new settler was timber and water, and so we find that the Minnesota river formed a natural base for the settlement of the valley; for, though the open prairie lands were more easily brought under cultivation, the first settlers, practically helpless for want of transportation, kept near to timber, which was necessary both for fuel and building purposes.

The first settlers in Redwood county were Col. Samuel McPhail, O. C. Martin, John B. Thompson, T. W. Caster, Orrin Fletcher, and John W. Dunlap, who arrived at the Falls of the Redwood on May 2nd, 1864. It is to be noted that notwithstanding the punishment and forcible expulsion of the hostile Indians, enough remained skulking in the woods and about the county to keep the whites in a constant state of alarm. We find that these first settlers at once on their arrival began the erection of temporary sleeping quarters built of logs and banked up with sods; that this was followed by a block house 16 by 24 feet in area and high enough to give sleeping quarters upstairs; and that afterward a stockade 150 by 200 feet was built, inside of which three or four other houses were built from time to time to accommodate the newcomers. All had the feeling that it was unsafe to risk living on the claims which they took in the vicinity a little later. Col. McPhail says in a letter: "May 16th our post was reinforced by the arrival of Capt. Ed. Post and Frank Kennedy. They took claims on the west side, known as the Cook place. They planted potatoes, corn, and melons. This was the only planting done that 282 season in the colony. Messrs. Post and Kennedy assisted in building the stockade, but did not remain permanently."

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The record shows the name of John S. G. Honner as the next arrival, and soon David Watson came in and built a small house inside the stockade. Jacob Tippery and George Spangler also arrived about this time.

There is evidence, in Col. McPhail's letters, that the few Indians still remaining in the vicinity kept the little colony constantly on the alert during the whole of this first summer. On May 24th to Col. Pfaender, in command at Fort Ridgely, he says: "There are in this vicinity six or eight straggling Indians. If you could send up ten or twelve cavalry for a few days, with our aid I feel confident we could capture them." On June 2nd he wrote to Gen. Sibley: "We are and have been greatly annoyed by small bands of prowling Indians. We would respectfully ask, if not inconsistent with the public service, that you grant us a small detachment of troops." Again, under date of June 14th, to the adjutant general, Oscar Malmros, he says: "Send me to Fort Ridgely twenty Springfield rifles; also, 1,000 round ball cartridges. Should we use these cartridges, we will pay for them with scalps, that is, if the bounty of \$200 still holds good; if not, then charge them to the good of the service." The authorities responded to the appeals by sending guns and ammunition on July 28th, and, on December 12th, a squad of twelve ex-rebels for guard duty. In the early fall the settlers were reinforced by the arrival of A. W. Webster, J. W. Harkness, and Birney Flynn.

On July 12th the little community began to feel the want of a postoffice and petitioned the postmaster general, setting forth that they were twenty-two miles from the nearest office and praying that an office be established at Redwood Falls, which petition was granted in the fall, John R. Thompson being appointed postmaster.

The presidential election of 1864 was approaching and the hardy pioneers, not desiring to be disfranchised, petitioned Governor Miller for the establishment of an election district, in pursuance of which the governor set off the whole county, as it was afterward organized, including the present county with Lyon, Lincoln, Yellow Medicine, and Lac qui Parle counties, as such district. The election of 1864 was held at the 283 house of John S. G. Honner inside the stockade; the election board being O. C. Martin, T. W. Caster, and Ed

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McCormick. In reference to the election Col. McPhail says: "We cast sixty-five votes, all straight Republican; no intimidation, no bulldozing." The United States government had the lands in the county surveyed during the summer and fall of 1864, and that fact may explain where a part of the sixty-five votes came from, as the roster does not show that number of permanent settlers.

Col. McPhail and T. W. Caster took the claims on which the original town of Redwood Falls was located, and later McPhail bought out Caster and had the village platted into four hundred lots which were sold in shares of twenty lots each at \$100 a share. Among the other settlers who entered claims in this vicinity, O. C. Martin and Edmund Fosgate located about two and a half miles southwest of the village, and John S. G. Honner two miles north, all on the Redwood river. The land, having been surveyed, was appraised by commissioners in the fall of 1864, who valued the most of it at \$1.25 per acre; though some special tracts and timber lands, with those on which improvements had been made, were rated from \$2.50 to \$5 per acre.

The first permanent officers of the county were elected in November, 1865. O. C. Martin, chairman, Hugh Currie, and John Winters, were commissioners; Edward March was auditor; L. M. Baker, register of deeds; Jacob Tippery, treasurer; Samuel McPhail, clerk of court and county attorney; and Norma Webster, sheriff. The county seat was established at Redwood Falls, at the same election. As noted above, Gov. Miller had set off what now comprises five counties as an election district, which surely could not interfere with the right of the voter; but attention is called to a peculiar feature of this early arrangement, granting to all voters living in unorganized townships the right to vote in the village of Redwood Falls, which right continued as late as 1882.

The first term of court held in the county was at Redwood Falls over the store building of Louis Robert, beginning June 18th, 1867, for the trial of what are known as the New Ulm murder cases. The trial had been removed from Brown county because the presiding judge, Hon. Horace Austin, found public sentiment too much prejudiced to admit

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of a fair trial at New Ulm. The attorneys in the case were Col. Colvill, attorney general, Samuel McPhail, county attorney, and S. A. Buell, for the prosecution; and Judge C. E. Flandrau, of St. Paul, C. T. Clothier, Francis Baasen, and John McDorman, of New Ulm, for the defense. The defendants were charged with taking two men, who had assaulted a barkeeper, to the Minnesota river and drowning them by putting them under the ice. The trial resulted in an acquittal.

Col. McPhail generously donated a block of ground for county purposes, on which the first court house, twenty-eight feet square, with a court room upstairs, was built in 1874. At that time it was the most commodious and pretentious building in the county. To this modest beginning an addition of the same size was made in 1881, which provided convenient quarters for the transaction of public business until 1891, when the present very complete court house of brick was erected at a cost of \$35,000. The county has also a jail building which cost \$15,000. Previous to the building of the first court house the public offices were kept mostly at private houses, and terms of court were held in different halls.

Miss Julia A. Williams taught a private school in the stockade in 1864; but the educational history of the county opened with the organization of school district No. 1 at Redwood Falls in April, 1866, with Edward March, county auditor, who had also been appointed superintendent of schools, as teacher. There were in 1878 only thirty-three organized school districts. In 1886, when the number of school districts had increased to sixty-seven, a thorough attempt was made to systematize the work and improve the teaching force of the county, among which there was hardly a first grade teacher in the rural districts, and more holding third than second grade certificates. In Redwood Falls, Independent District No. 1 now has a thoroughly graded and high school system, with twelve teachers, a library of 1,000 volumes, necessary apparatus for the illustration of the sciences, and an enrollment of 500 pupils. The county now has seven graded schools with one or more departments, and 93 school districts, with 103 school buildings, nearly all of which are comfortable and well furnished.

At the present time over 4,000 pupils are enrolled; and 126 teachers, of whom forty hold first grade certificates or normal school diplomas, are employed. Only seven third grade licenses are in force. Sixty districts are supplied with libraries, ranging in value from \$60 to \$100. Ninety per cent. of the districts supply text books to pupils free of charge. S. J. Race, the present very efficient superintendent, has held the office since 1886.

To a new settlement, after shelter and the means of subsistence are provided, the question of transportation is of the highest importance. At the beginning the only means of communication between the little colony and St. Paul, the general market and base of supplies, was the Minnesota river, which even at Mankato was too uncertain to afford satisfactory business facilities with the outside world. At New Ulm, the next place of importance up the river, boats were only expected to run for a month or two in the spring, and possibly a month in the fall. Yet the energetic settlers at Redwood determined to do the best they could to induce steamboat owners to risk a trip to their growing settlement, forty miles beyond New Ulm. From 1865 to 1876 it was nearly always possible for small stern-wheel boats to make a trip or two to Redwood in the spring; and during one season the stage of water permitted Gen. M.D. Flower to reach there several times with his boat, the Osceola. The Pioneer was chartered by D. L. Bigham in the spring of 1869, loaded with lumber at St. Paul, and made a successful trip.

In 1875 a large warehouse was built at the landing on the Minnesota, called Riverside, by a company, for the purpose of providing storage, and to give an outlet by the river for the wheat crop, of which 60,000 bushels were brought and stored during the next fall and winter. In the spring of 1876 two side-wheel steamboats arrived at Riverside, laden with lumber, and took out the wheat in store and a large amount from Redwood and private parties. To warehouse men, and to Daniels & Son, who had opened a general store and built a hotel, the transportation scheme seemed solved, but it proved only a case of whistling before getting out of the woods. In a few days it was learned that the

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boats were stranded on a sandbar at the mouth of the Blue Earth river, and the parties 286 who shipped the wheat were called on to furnish sacks and men to transfer the grain to the railroad. This practically put an end to the Riverside and steamboat transportation scheme. The warehouse and hotel were removed to Redwood Falls and used in building an elevator and hotel there.

Capt. Leroy Newton made a further effort to utilize the river. He took a large barge and rigged a wheel at the stern, which was propelled by an ordinary eight-horse thresher power. This, however, proved unsuccessful; though it was of some help to reach New Ulm, which was the end of his run.

The first newspaper published was the Redwood Falls Mail, in September, 1869, by V. C. Seward, which was bought by William B. Herriott in May, 1873. The name was changed at the same time to the Redwood Gazette, and it is now issued under this name by Aiken & Schmahl, proprietors.

The Winona & St. Peter railway was built to Lamberton and through the southern part of Redwood county in 1873; its branch, the Minnesota Valley railway, running from Sleepy Eye to Redwood Falls, was completed in August, 1878; and the Minneapolis & St. Louis railway company built its line to North Redwood in 1885.

The Redwood County Agricultural Society was organized in 1873, and held its first fair that fall. There was hardly any progress made until 1882, when it was reorganized, issued stock to the amount of \$500, and bought forty acres of land, on which it has gradually built comfortable buildings. It has a good half mile track and a grand stand. The policy of the management has been conservative, and there has been a little profit nearly every year.

The land office of the Redwood Falls land district was established in July, 1872, with Col. B. F. Smith, register, and Major W. H. Kelley, receiver. These officers were succeeded

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by Capt. W. P. Dunnington and W. B. Herriott. The office was removed to Marshall some years ago.

The first banking business, opened as a private bank in November, 1871, by W. F. Dickenson, has since been incorporated under the state laws as the Bank of Redwood Falls, with a capital of \$25,000. The first store, except one opened by Louis Robert in the stockade, was opened by H. Benke & 287 Brother, in July, 1865, under the management of A. Northrup. The first hotel, the Exchange, was built by James McMillan and opened in 1865, on the lots now occupied by the county jail.

The first physician to locate in the county was Dr. D. L. Hitchcock, who came with his family in 1865. Col. Samuel McPhail was the first attorney.

The first grain elevator was erected in 1878, with a capacity of 100,000 bushels. The first blacksmith shop was opened by John Thomas, in the spring of 1865. W. P. Tenney opened a barber shop in 1870, and has continued the business to this time.

The first birth was of Henry Thompson, to Mr. and Mrs. J. R. Thompson, in February, 1865; and the first death was of Willie Honner, son of Mr. and Mrs. J. S. G. Honner, on April 12th, 1865. The first religious services were held by a Baptist clergyman in August, 1865, at the house of J. S. G. Honner. "The first marriage ceremony was performed by O. C. Martin, justice of the peace, between George Coffee and Amanda Cole. It took place under the falls, where the parties chose it should be solemnized."

The government built a saw mill at the falls of the Redwood in 1855, for the purpose of supplying lumber for houses to be built for the Indians. The raceway was blasted out of granite forming the ledge of the falls. E.G. Pomroy, now living in the town of Underwood, assisted in building the mill. During the outbreak, or later, it was entirely dismantled, and all the machinery was carried away, presumably not by the Sioux. The building, however, remained, and it was refitted and put in order in 1865 by McPhail, Martin and Thompson, who there sawed the lumber for all the frame buildings erected in the vicinity. This was, at

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the time, the most important, and, if the report of a charge of \$16 a thousand for sawing be true, the most profitable industry above New Ulm. Another saw mill was built by Ener and Andrew Birum in 1869, on the Redwood about half a mile above the confluence with the Minnesota, which, with an abundance of native timber near at hand and a Constantly increasing demand, as in the case of the mill at the falls, proved both a necessary and profitable venture.

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The first grist mill in the county, now called the Redwood Roller Mills, was built in 1868 by Park Worden and S. J. F. Ruter, just above the falls of the Redwood, with two run of stone and room for two run additional. This mill has since been changed to the roller system, has been supplied with modern facilities and appliances, and has a capacity of seventy-five barrels of flour a day. The present owner is A. C. Burmeister.

A. M. Cook and Sons built the Delhi Mill, with three run of stone, in 1869, higher up on the river, at its crossing by the old territorial road. This mill was owned later by W. E. Baker and James McMillan, and later still by O. W. McMillan & Co. It was destroyed by fire in 1895.

Bridge building was inaugurated in the county by the legislature of 1871, which passed an act appropriating \$5,000 for the construction of a Howe truss bridge across the Redwood river at the dalles. This bridge was entirely of wood. The bill was introduced by Hon. J. S. G. Honner, representative, and was passed only after a hard fight. The amount was the first considerable sum appropriated from the internal improvement fund created by the five per cent. given to the state in sales of government lands. The bridge was replaced some years ago by an iron combination structure on a more modern plan.

The early settlement of the county was greatly retarded by the withdrawal from the operation of the homestead law of a large body of land for a railroad bonus, equal to half of the area in most townships; by the location of considerable tracts of the University

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and Internal Improvement grants within its limits: and by the sale of a large part of the reservation to non-residents.

A second cause of discouragement and delay was the visit of the grasshoppers, lasting from 1874 to 1877, during which time very little was harvested. The eggs were laid in the prairie each year, and they hatched out just in time for the young hoppers to move into the wheat fields when the tender blades were two or three inches high, and to eat them off so close to the ground that it gave the appearance of a fire having passed over the fields. If anything had escaped their ravages, later in the season, on some fair day, a fleecy cloud 289 might be seen between the observer and the sun, which would prove to be an invading host of these marauders seeking something to devour. Verily, the grasshopper was a burden during those disastrous years! The farmers lost courage and in many cases were driven away altogether from the places where they had hoped to make their homes. Many others were compelled to leave their claims temporarily to procure means of subsistence for themselves and their families. The state did what it could to furnish seed grain on two or three occasions, and donations from the older counties relieved the situation in a slight degree; but, in any view, it was a most trying experience to the hardy and industrious pioneer families, who, at the best, could only maintain the position they had taken on the frontier by hard work and self-denial.

Kaolin is found in large quantities on the left bank of the Redwood river within the limits of the city of Redwood Falls, samples of which have been tested and reported to be of good quality; but thus far no effort has been made to work or prepare it for market, and it is as yet an undeveloped resource.

A low grade of lignite is found at three or four places in the bluff along the Minnesota river, and an excavation in its larger bed is known as the Peabody mine. An effort was made about five years ago, in 1893, to develop this deposit, the view of the interested parties being that the indications were that a good quality of bituminous coal would be found by opening the seam to a considerable depth. After spending much money, it was discovered

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that, though the product would burn, it had no commercial value, and further effort was abandoned.

There are extensive granite ledges within the borders of the county, along the Minnesota river; in two of which, at North Redwood and again at a point north of Belview, quarries have been opened and worked to quite an extent, enough, at the least, to demonstrate that the product is of a high quality, and that it is only necessary for a demand to spring up to make these quarries, as well as others not yet opened, a permanent and profitable industry.

The county has been fortunate in its financial policy and has always kept faith with its creditors. Notwithstanding its early disability to levy taxes equally, by reason of a very large 19 290 portion of its land being non-taxable, and in spite of the grasshopper raid, which made it impossible for settlers to pay, the necessary expenses were always met without incurring debt. It is due to the different boards of county commissioners and officers who have been in control from, time to time, to say that the management of county affairs has been prudent, business-like and conservative; and to these officers, in a large degree, is due the high credit and financial standing of the count. The present indebtedness of the county is \$45,000 in county bonds drawing interest at five per cent., issued for a part of \$50,000 given to the Minnesota Valley railway company in 1878, and the balance for county buildings. The county property consists of a court house erected at a cost of \$35,000; a jail costing \$15,000; and the county poor farm, \$5,000. This does not take account of delinquent taxes. The valuation of the assessment of 1897 was \$4,842,458. The number of acres in crops last year was 167,110; add to this some 200,000 acres of pasture, and we find that the farmers have utilized two-thirds of the 557,000 acres of land contained in the county.

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This paper has been written with the purpose of taking up the subjects of the organization of towns and villages, the history of religious bodies and secret orders, and the general development of the agricultural and other industries of the county, at a future time.